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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: July 06, 2007

Parliament Wraps Up Investigative Committees

[¶1.](#) The Austrian Parliament will meet for its last session before the summer recess today. After it concluded the investigation into the purchase of Eurofighter interceptors for Austria's armed forces yesterday, Parliament will now also wrap up the inquiry into Austrian banking practices in connection with the bank Bawag scandal. In the absence of an agreed outcome, committee chairperson Martin Graf will present a report to Parliament. Later, Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer and Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik will present their assessments of the EU summit in June, says ORF radio early morning news Morgenjornal.

Eurofighter: Accusations Continue

[¶2.](#) Mutual accusations over the purchase of Eurofighter interceptors for Austria continued in Parliament yesterday. The head of the investigative committee looking into the deal, Peter Pilz of the Green Party, argued that the investigation had been a success and done valuable work demonstrating the significance of parliamentary control, "in spite of the OeVP's" attitude. Pilz also accused the SPOe of having "gone back on its word," an accusation the Social Democrats have rejected, defending Defense Minister Norbert Darabos and claiming that a cancellation of the deal would not have been an option, despite the findings of the parliamentary expert opinions on the matter.

Like all Austrian media reporting on the Eurofighter controversy, semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung writes that Defense Minister Norbert Darabos from the Social Democratic Party "weathered a vote of no confidence" in Parliament yesterday. The motion tabled by the FPOe was backed by the Greens and the BZÖ, but failed to get any support from the two major parties, the SPOe and the OeVP. The ensuing Eurofighter debate turned out to be quite heated, the daily continues, with the SPOe and the OeVP successfully dispelling the opposition parties' misgivings about the deal, thus paving the way for the first jets to be delivered to Austria. Liberal daily Der Standard also reports on the "final round" in the "fight over the Eurofighter," and quotes the OeVP as saying the first interceptors are expected to land in Austria as early as next week.

Ambassador McCaw Ends Her Assignment

[¶3.](#) Several Austrian media continue to report on the press release put out by the US Embassy Vienna earlier this announcing that US Ambassador to Austria Susan McCaw will end her assignment towards the end of this year. Austrian media also report on this year's

event at the Ambassador's residence in Vienna to celebrate Independence Day.

Mass-circulation tabloid Oesterreich reports on what it believes are the "real reasons" for why US Ambassador to Austria Susan McCaw has "made the certainly difficult decision" to end her assignment this year. According to the tabloid, the "charming US Ambassador" is stepping down in favor of her family, preferring to return to the US over continuing the "long-distance relationship" with her husband Craig McCaw. The Ambassador underscored, however, that it is a "great honor to serve as the President's representative to Austria, this wonderful and dynamic country." According to Oesterreich, the announcement of her departure came at a time when Mrs. McCaw, a close friend of US President George Bush, had "successfully won the hearts of the Austrian people" with her "pleasant and personable style and proverbial diplomacy." Ambassador McCaw is "the fourth in a series of power ladies heading the US Embassy in Vienna," where her staff has experienced her as an "extremely likeable and entirely down-to-earth boss," Oesterreich writes.

Centrist daily Die Presse meanwhile reports on this year's July 4 Party at the Ambassador's residence - the last Independence Day celebration for US Ambassador McCaw in Vienna. Among the about 1,000 guests on Wednesday, who thoroughly enjoyed the "country- and western-style" event complete with hot dogs and hamburgers, cowboy hats and bandanas, line-dancing and a band playing country music, were Austrian Minister for Healthcare Andrea Kdolsky, Interior Minister Guenther Platter, State Secretary in the Foreign Minister Hans Winkler, UN special rapporteur for torture Manfred Nowak, the head of the Austrian Muslim Community Anas Shakfeh, US Ambassador to the OSCE Julie Finley and US Ambassador to UNVIE Gregory Schulte, the daily notes.

More Fighting At Pakistani Mosque

¶4. Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf has intervened in the siege of the Red Mosque in Islamabad, ordering a temporary halt to the security forces' operations against radical militants inside the complex. One of the mosque's leaders said he and his followers were "ready to surrender," if they were not arrested. However, according to a spokesperson for the Pakistani government, the offer has been rejected. ORF radio quotes the spokesperson as stressing the militants' move would "not be accepted." Their leader "is a criminal, and he has to come and surrender before the government unconditionally," according to the spokesperson. Further explosions and gunfire have been reported around the mosque this morning. Reporting on the current developments in Pakistan, liberal daily Der Standard says that after several days of fighting at the Red Mosque in Islamabad, the Pakistani security forces have further increased pressure on the people barricaded in the besieged mosque. While the captured head of the mosque has called on his followers to surrender, the radical students are apparently planning to use the hundreds of women and children they are holding in the complex as human shields, the daily says. The Standard's foreign affairs writer Markus Bernath meanwhile comments that if Musharraf's army "succeeds in ending the siege of the Red Mosque without much bloodshed, the head of state has once again established himself as a guarantor of stability in a chronically unstable country." Bernath also believes that a "half-way successful autocrat in Pakistan would at any rate be more bearable for the West than a democratic regime of political parties which would pursue its own interests in an unrestrained fashion, break down under the pressure of the various interest groups in the country, and pave the way for an Islamist leadership of the nuclear power Pakistan." Similarly, mass-circulation daily Kurier says the Pakistani security forces' tactical "goal is to wear down the students still holed up in the Red Mosque." The daily's foreign affairs editor Livia Klingl argues that Pakistan has "taken precedence over Afghanistan when it comes to recruiting religious warriors from all over the world. It is a place of rest and a mental training ground for future suicide bombers - and it is increasingly becoming a failed state, a country which is ungovernable."

Israel Continues Gaza Operations

¶5. Israel continued its actions against militants in Gaza yesterday, using aircraft, tanks and bulldozers, before withdrawing early this morning. More than ten militants, most of them from Hamas, have reportedly been killed in the operation. According to witnesses,

there was a heavy exchange of fire between the Israeli forces and Hamas and Islamic Jihad militants. According to the Israeli military, the operations aim at putting a stop to Palestinians firing rocket from Gaza against Israeli border settlements, according to liberal daily Der Standard.

McCaw